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James Maynard

A BOOK OF TWENTY-FOUR
SONNETS BY LAURENS
MAYNARD

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LAURENS MAYNARD

1894

To My Wife

OF the twenty-four Sonnets herein contained all but eight are now published for the first time. "My Ideal" appeared originally in *The Cosmopolitan Magazine*; "The City of the Dead" in *The New England Magazine*; "The Boy Columbus" and "Budding Morrow" in *Kate Field's Washington*; "The Magi's Gifts" in *The Catholic World*; "Madonna Mia" in *Worthington's Magazine*, and "In Sunset" in *Far and Near*; while "Sunrise Land" was written as a proem for a guide-book to the Maine and Canadian coasts, by Mr. H. D. Young, entitled "Toward the Sunrise."

A BOOK OF TWENTY-FOUR SONNETS

I

MY IDEAL

I ASK not radiant beauty for her face,
Nor perfect contour for her cherished form;—
If but with love sincere her heart be warm
Each line will seem to me of matchless grace;
Nor care I though she lack a cultured mind, ;
In lore of bygone sages deeply learned—
Full many a soul Life's truths hath well discerned
By pureness made an eye among the blind.—
Let her be simple, sweet, and true in heart;
Neither too good to sense the joys of earth
Nor yet too sordid Heaven to understand;
With calm reliance in her soul's command;
Able by her example to impart
Her virtues to the children of her birth.

II

EVE'S DAUGHTERS

She wanders through the city's crowded streets;—
With eager eye she scans the passing throng,
Alert to read desire in those she meets;
Her lips half-conscious of a careless song,
And shameless pride seems all her mind to hold.—
But as she passes, yon poor girl, whose face
Speaks purity, draws back from one so bold
And looks with scorn on her unholy grace.—
She sees the glance;—the careless song has ceased;—
Her fallen eyes in shame their drooped lids hide;
And like to life before her seems to rise
Her mother's face and form from death released,—
Herself a pure child standing by her side,—
And quick the bitter tears bedim her eyes!

III

THE CITY OF THE DEAD

THE green field widens out from where I lie;
The grass waves idly in the Summer breeze;
The squirrel scampers through the bending trees,—
And to and from their nests the robins fly.
From every side the perfume of bright flowers
Mingles its sweetness with the balmy air,
While many a butterfly of colors rare
Darts in and out the blossom-laden bowers;—
Yet, save the stir of leaves there come no sounds
Except the twittering of birds, which seems
A half-heard echo in a land of dreams;—
A mystic hush the hallowed place surrounds
Where peaceful sleep, each in his narrow bed,
The dwellers of the City of the Dead.

IV

HELEN OF TROY

WAS she whose dazzling beauty long ago
Filled a young world with strife and sorrows keen
Of stature queenly, with commanding mien
And haughty features? Nay, I think not so;
But, rather, she was soft, and sweet, and small;
With baby features, and bewitching smile
So innocent, that seems to know no guile
Yet hides a heart unprincipled in all;
And with clear eyes,—false, false in everything!—
Could look her lover in the face and ask
“Canst thou then doubt me?” and her feelings mask
And seem to speak with truth’s sincerest ring.—
For such the women are since time began
That have beguiled the strongest hearts of man.

V

THE BOY COLUMBUS

A PENSIVE youth that haunts the ocean shore
Attentive listening to old seamen's tales;
Or watching long the fleet of tossing sails
Far out beyond the sea-beat coast's loud roar;
Or bent with eager eyes some volume o'er,
His boyish cheek now flushes and now pales,
Reading of barks storm-tossed before great gales
In many a wondrous story of sea-lore.—
Perchance the child to those old sailors seemed
Only an idle listener — although
E'en then of great discoveries he dreamed,
Which day by day more real to him did grow,
Until so clear the path became, he deemed
He heard the voice of God commanding, "Go!"

A PORTRAIT

A SLENDER form of grace that day by day
I watch and see upon my attentive eyes
New and maturer beauties dawn, which say
That womanhood is born and girlhood dies.
Sweet, pensive eyes, that speak a wealth of love
As yet all unbestowed stored up within;
Such eyes of pureness as a guileless dove
May have, as yet unconscious of all sin.—
The moist red lips so ripe for kisses sweet
Still smile in innocence; the soft brown hair
Beclouds her forehead, while dark tresses meet
Loose-braided falling o'er her shoulders fair.—
God keep her thus, and in her woman's face
May girlhood's purity still hold its place!

DELILAH

MY soul ofttimes would rise to purer air;
My wayward feet reseek the upward path;—
Not that I fear the terrors of God's wrath
But in desire that I His peace might share.
And then I feel thy hand upon mine own
Restraining, and before my prayerful eyes
Thy face in dreamy sweetness seems to rise,—
And Heaven's pearly gates are turned to stone.
My aspirations vanish and again
My love for thee supreme holds full control
Of all my heart's desires, and my soul
Claims only thee in blind, unreasoning pain;—
And with thy lips forever mine to kiss
I feel that Hell itself would be but bliss!

VIII

"LOKI UND SIGYN"

Suggested by Carl Gerhardt's Painting

BOUND to a rock gigantic which the tides
In angry surges lash, but break in foam
Impotent on its everlasting sides,
Fierce Loki lies—this his eternal home—
And unavailing as the raging waves
Struggles to burst his bonds. Above his head
The poison-dropping serpent ceaseless raves;
But Sigyn, by a tender wife-love led,
Stands ever ready with her cup to seize
The scalding venom. Thus the gods' decrees
Are overruled;—and to my mind the thought
Thence comes that we, when all our life is fraught
With trials sore of baneful destiny,
Relief from all our pains in love can see.

IX

TO GERTRUDE

An Acrostic

G RACEFUL and light must verses be to tell
Each charm of thine that captive holds my heart.
Rarer the gift that could to words impart
Thy fairness in my sight, who loving well
Read beauty in each feature and dispel
Under thy smile all sadness.— How could art
Describe thee fitly?— When from thee apart
Each hour, in whatsoever place I dwell,
With tardy minutes lingers wearily.
Could thy dear face forever greet mine eyes
All loneliness would vanish— these dull skies
In Summer splendors ever clothed would be;—
Nor could I ever fail in love for thee;—
Entire in thy hand my future lies!

X

THE MAGI'S GIFTS

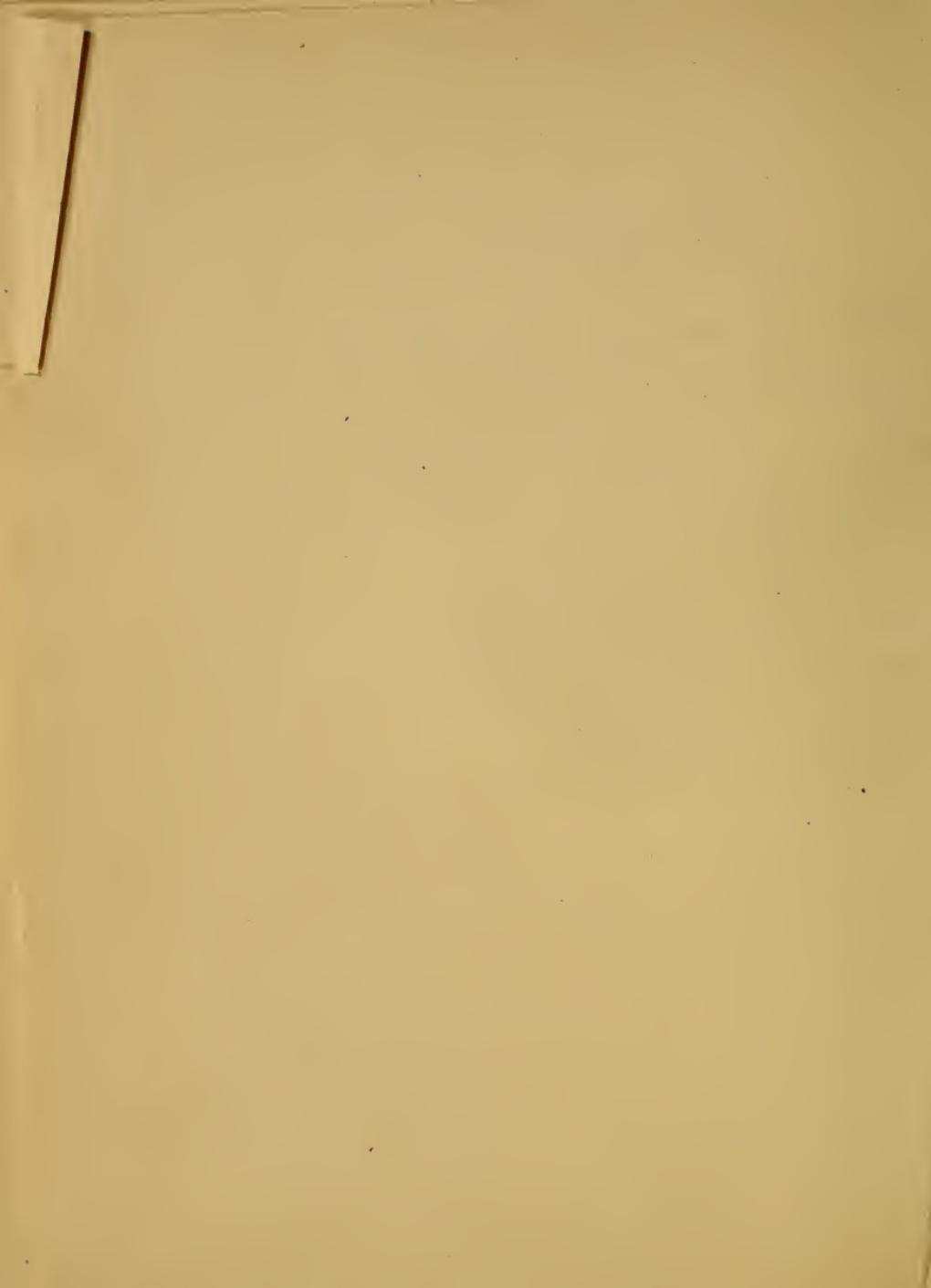
NAY, Lord! not thus, not thus!— It is not meet
To bring rich offerings to Thy sacred shrine
Who, having all things mundane and divine
Created, carest not for incense sweet.
These arches towering splendid to the skies,
These glided altars and these vestments rich,
These costly statues carven in each niche,
Are but the world's display in holy guise.
Nay, when we offer Thee earth's richest store
We but present Thee that Thou hads't before;
But when our hearts we to Thy service lend
We offer Thee a gift that ne'er shall end,—
And Thou hast said, “A broken contrite heart
In sacrifice is Mine accepted part.”

XI

AN INSCRIPTION

In a volume of Herrick's "Hesperides."—For J. P. P.

TO her whose sweet-voiced song like a pure brook
In smooth and sparkling verse flows light and free,
Take all the pleasure that thou gavest me
When first I read thy words, O little book !
Each mood and inner feeling with her share ;—
If she be glad rehearse thy liveliest strain ;
If gay, thy witty lines repeat again ;
If pensive tell her all thy wisdom rare,—
And be thy mission thus to give her mind
With thy bright verse enjoyment unconfined ;
Though if thou canst perform one other task
To bring me joy, this be the boon I ask :
Let whatsoever on thy page she see
Direct her thoughts a moment unto me.



XII

BUDDING MORROW

"There is a budding morrow in midnight." — KEATS

ALTHOUGH at midnight's chime all light from earth
Be fled, and through night's shadows to the eyes
Of us, the weary watchers of the skies,
No sign appears of a glad morrow's birth;
Yet at that moment the receding sun
Starts on his course returning to our sight,—
Though it be long ere any rays of light
Announce his progress on the path begun.
Therefore, O Soul, in trial's darkest hour
Have faith;— for now, thy deepest sorrow past,
The sun of joy, his steps retracing fast,
Journeys to meet thee with increasing power;
And soon his light shall to thine eyes appear,
Dispelling gloom and shaming all thy fear.

XIII

TO L. A. C.

Written after seeing her illustration for "The Dance of Death"

TO thee, who hast so fully grasped the thought
Which my imperfect verse essayed to speak,
My thanks are due.—The inspirations caught
By thine artistic pencil show how weak
My own conceptions were, and are become
The matchless gem which, mounted e'en in dross,
Attracts our wondering gaze and makes us dumb
With admiration.—I shall feel no loss
If thy work draw the greater share of praise;—
Contented I if but a single glance
Rest on my unskilled verse, and that glance be
One having favor for my weird "Death's Dance."
Ungrateful am I not—I would be he
Who honor to the one deserving pays.

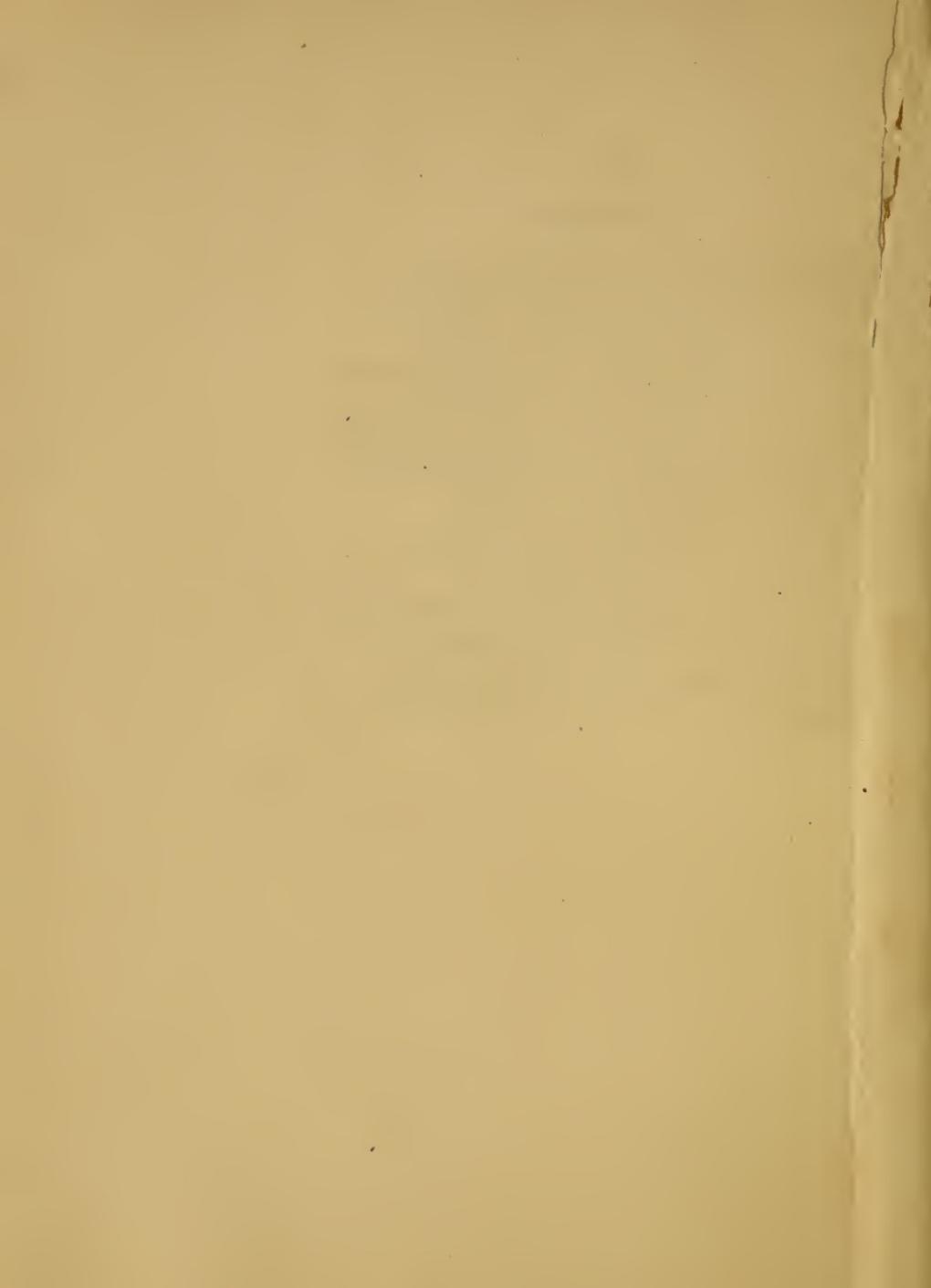


MADONNA MIA

HE has a face in which you might not see
More fairness than is common to her sex;—
Although each feature her pure soul reflects
In lines of sweet perfection unto me.
She has a form which to your searching eyes
Might show no more than ordinary grace;—
And yet to me, e'en as her peerless face,
Discloses beauty such as never dies.
She has a voice which you indeed might hear
Without emotion;— yet, the truth confessed,
An ecstasy of pleasure fills my breast
If but its slightest whisper strikes mine ear.
Face, form, and voice, my heart enchain through life;
The reason, do you ask? — She is my wife.

IN SUNSET

THE setting sun has sunk into the west;
On fleecy clouds the tints of dying light
Grow ever fainter, fading from my sight,—
And sleepy chirping birds have sought their nest.
The world in sombre grey of twilight drest
Seems strangely silent as the approaching night
Follows with darkness on the daylight's flight;
And weary Nature sinks into her rest.
I turn to thee, dear one beside me here,
In loneliness, but in thy features see
Love's glorious light all unbedimmed still shine,
Flooding my heart with radiance divine;—
And quick I feel that I should know no fear
Since that sweet sun shall never set to me.



XVI

GHOSTS

AND why should I his simple faith deride
A Who holds the soul released from bonds of earth
May quit the shadowy realms of its new birth —
What while it stands some earthly mate beside,
Seen but of him and by none other eye?
Since souls have (as ye say) eternal life
Can aught be strange amid this endless strife
Where Time still hurries to Eternity? —
Not while to me more wondrous shades appear
Which ne'er had mortal form, yet which I see
In outline clear before me, while I hear:
“We are the deeds of love undone by thee, —
Thy wasted hours of rejected light; —
And while thou livest we may not quit thy sight!”

XVII

AFTER SLEEP—WAKING

THE day is gone;—the sun has sunk from sight;—

And with the day is gone the loud turmoil—

Voices of joy and sorrow—sounds of toil,

All gone and silence follows with the night.

Now all the weary that in this day's fight

Strove bravely onward o'er the stubborn soil,

And halted not through many a bitter foil,

Sleep peacefully awaiting morning light.—

As now in grateful trust of coming dawn

We close our eyes and sink into sweet rest,

E'en thus, when at the close of Life's long day

Our weary hearts the call to sleep obey,

In steadfast[”] hope enfolded to Death's breast

We'll wait the advent of eternal morn.

XVIII

SUNRISE LAND

BY the warm breath of Summer gently fanned,
Away from home and thoughts of care we steal
Within the wide-decked ship, whose eager keel
Spurning our shores, steers forth for "Sunrise Land."—
Now vast and multitudinous on each hand
The restless surging ocean billows reel,
And o'er their foam-capped crests to us reveal
The outlines of a panorama grand :—
Passamaquoddy's shores and islands green;
The rugged sea-girt cliffs of Grand Manan
Forever washed by Fundy's mighty tides;
Acadian fields, and Blomidon's steep sides;
And Breton's cape — whereon the sun to man
New rising in the western world is seen.

XIX

FIRST MEETING

A S one red rose within a garden fair
Blossoms sometimes, and to perfection blown
Amid the wealth of flowers stands alone;
(For none can with its matchless hues compare)
And coming on the beauty unaware
We watch it enviously where it has grown,
Yet hesitate to pluck and make our own
So rich a bud of loveliness so rare;—
E'en so amid a throng of maidens sweet,—
Whose fairness seemed when matched beside thy grace
As light of stars before the queenly moon—
Thou stoodst when first I gazed upon thy face;
And though I dared not hope so great a boon,
With eager longing quick my pulses beat!

XX

PLIGHTED TROTH

S TILL in my memory lives that long-past day,
Radiant with all the beauties of new Spring,
When with a burst of rapture seemed to sing
Each feathered chorister, and all the way
Through woodland paths the dainty flowers of May
Bloomed at our feet, and in my heart did ring
Responsive harmony,—each living thing
Seemed clothed with heavenly light.—I heard thee say:
“Where'er thy journey tend I will be thine;
Though dark the way, though clouds o'ercast the sky,
Sunshine must follow storm with thee near-by;—
Lead but thou on,—thy pathway shall be mine.”—
And at the word I sensed new joys divine
And read my Heaven in thy love-lit eye.

XXI

HONEYMOON

AT length the long expected day is past;
What seemed a dream of happiness too rare
For man this side of Heaven's gates to share
Is realized by me. At last, at last
Thou'rt all mine own!—No clouds of doubt o'er cast
Our wedded life; serene the peaceful air
Breathes round us and thy loving smile so fair
Sheds sunlight in my heart to thine bound fast.
Gone are the maddening raptures which I knew
When love and trust with fear and doubt made strife;
Instead, a holy calm fills all my life,
For perfect knowledge hath cast out all fear;
And while thine eyes I see, thy voice I hear,
What can I do but ever know thee true!

NUPITAL SLEEP

A S in the dusky night I ope mine eyes
And gather back my thoughts from idle dreams,
Thy sleeping face beside me pillow'd seems
Such phantasy as in my dreams did rise ;
And I a moment wondering gaze and fear
Thy form will fade.— I touch the silken hair
Which like an aureole frames thy features fair
And wonder still thou dost not disappear ;
But as I fold thee to my breast and see
The wealth of love within thy wakened eyes,—
(As waters deep reflect the boundless skies)
And crush thy lips in kisses sweet to me,—
I know my bliss is real, that dreams are o'er,
And I am thine, thou mine, forevermore !

XXIII

MATERNITY

HOW can I tell with what grave fears possessed
I watched thee slowly near that fateful day
On which I knew not whether I should say
Of all men I most cursed or most blest!
A thousand dread misgivings filled my breast
And oft from aching heart-depths did I pray
That thou, mine all, might not be taken away;—
And still my anxious heart could find no rest
Until that hour when first within thine arms
Close to thy breast I saw my baby boy;
Then were the shadows of my mind's alarms
Lost in a flood of overwhelming joy,
As in thine eyes I saw— Oh, light divine!—
The new love make the old love brighter shine.

FAITHFUL FOREVER

CAN it be true that five and thirty years
Have passed us, dearest, since our wedding-day?
If years bring changes with them (as some say)
Their changes were to us but empty fears;—
And to my heart no difference appears
Although we see our grandchildren to-day
Where once we watched our children's happy play:
Still the same love unchanged our old age cheers.—
When on thy face I gaze it is with eyes
That look far deeper than the outward form,
And seeing all the beauty of thy soul,
Will not admit one flaw within the whole
Of thy dear being, since thy heart is warm
With all that holy love which never dies.

HERE ENDS THE BOOK OF TWENTY-FOUR SONNETS
WRITTEN AT DIVERS TIMES BY LAURENS MAYNARD
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